

Good Afternoon. I am Ervin Carlson, President of the InterTribal Buffalo Council and a member of the Blackfeet Tribe. I am honored to present testimony today as an opponent of SB143.

ITBC is a national organization comprised of 56 Tribes across 19 States and every Tribe in Montana is a member of the organization.

For over 20 years, ITBC has worked to restore buffalo to Indian lands to re-establish the sacred relationship between buffalo and Indian people. Through our efforts, ITBC collectively manages the largest number of buffalo in the United States. We serve as the Indian voice on buffalo protection, management and conservation issues.

It is from this perspective that I am here today as an opponent of SB 143. My concerns are as follows:

First, this bill completely ignores the efforts of Montana Tribes to repopulate their lands with buffalo. Tribes have been collaborating with federal agencies for many years to restore buffalo to Indian lands. Buffalo are critically important to Tribes for spiritual and cultural reasons. Buffalo sustained Montana Tribes and the historical attack on buffalo was synonymous with attempts to annihilate Indians. Today's Indians want to rewrite this devastating history and collaborate with all parties for the restoration and protection of buffalo to Indian lands. Further, the bill obviously was developed without any consideration of Montana Indians or any attempt to consult with Tribal governments.

Second, the bill prohibits transfer and relocation of Yellowstone buffalo anywhere in the State of Montana except the Nation Bison Range. ITBC has been diligently working with the NPS toward eventual relocation of the buffalo to Indian lands – to preserve genetics and provide a sound management option for the surplus Yellowstone buffalo, rather than potential needless killing. Tribes have sufficient

land bases for translocation of the buffalo and a history of sound buffalo management.

Third, this bill would result in the Treaty Tribes losing their priority to hunt buffalo as an exercise of their treaty hunting rights. Montana had been a frontrunner to respecting and honoring Tribal treaty hunting rights by allowing Tribes a priority in hunting buffalo. This bill negates that priority hunting right and thus, retreats from the position of respect the State had for treaty hunting rights.

Fourth, hunting season could jeopardize buffalo and reminds Indians of the history of the needless killing of buffalo that nearly annihilated the buffalo population. This provision flies in the face of the long-standing management plan to preserve and protect Yellowstone bison and the goals and intent of Indian Tribes – to protect, restore and responsibly manage buffalo.